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Councilman wants hearing on environmental issue

By MICHAEL D. McELWAIN (mmcelwain@reviewonline.com)

EAST LIVERPOOL — City council member Brian Kerr said he will conduct a hearing on Ohio EPA findings against an East End business.

Kerr, chairman of the Environmental Committee, said an informational hearing will be held sometime before the end of the month.

On Monday, Ohio EPA Director Chris Korleski sent S.H. Bell Company a letter saying, "Recently I was briefed on the air quality study in East Liverpool and its findings of unusually high concentrations of manganese and chromium. I am very concerned about these findings and the potential for impacts to human health and the environment."

"They have tested the quality of the air and we are awaiting those results," Kerr said Wednesday evening. "This is huge. I live in the East End and I'm concerned about all of this. I'm concerned about the community, for my family and for my pets."

The Ohio EPA has not determined the impact of potential exposure to manganese or chromium.

According to Mike Settles, media representative for the Ohio EPA, Korleski is asking for cooperation from various state agencies to determine any impacts to the environment or on human health.

Kerr said questions are swirling about cancer risks and other issues.

"I plan to have all of the agencies lined up at the meeting and have a representative from the Ohio EPA there for sure," Kerr said.

The meeting may be held at the East Liverpool branch of Kent State University if necessary, Kerr said.

"This matter can not be held back. We need to get some answers and find a course of action," Kerr said.

In the meantime, East Liverpool Mayor Jim Swoger, also a resident in the East End, said he took a tour of the facility Wednesday afternoon and met with the business owners.

"They showed me what they actually have there, and I have a better understanding of the process," Swoger said. "I felt a little bit more at ease with the situation."

Swoger said his number one concern was with chromium since it is, in some forms, a cancer causing agent.

Swoger said all of the facts have not come in and it might be premature to jump to any conclusions at the stage.

According to Settles, the Ohio EPA determined S.H. Bell Company is the source contributing to the elevated outdoor air concentrations of both manganese and chromium.

Korleski asked S.H. Bell officials to respond promptly to his letter of findings and orders which would require the company to take immediate steps to control air emissions.

Section: News Date Posted: 2/7/2008

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State EPA cracks down on S.H. Bell

By MICHAEL D. McELWAIN (mmcelwain@reviewonline.com)

EAST LIVERPOOL — An East Liverpool business has been deemed a “public health nuisance” by a state agency and will face enforcement action.

S.H. Bell Company, located at 2217 Michigan Ave., is already facing federal EPA action but was informed about the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency issue in a letter sent Monday.

In the letter to S.H. Bell representatives, Ohio EPA Director Chris Korleski spoke of the seriousness of the situation and advised company leaders that the outdoor air concentration of manganese around the plant has the highest level recorded from any monitoring station in the United States.

“Recently I was briefed on the air quality study in East Liverpool and its findings of unusually high concentrations of manganese and chromium,” Korleski said. “I am very concerned about these findings and the potential for impacts to human health and the environment. I am moving quickly to bring other agencies up to speed on this study.”

According to Mike Settles, media representative for the Ohio EPA, dozens of outdoor air samples taken between 2000 and 2007 were analyzed. Three monitoring stations were located in the vicinity. One was placed at the East Liverpool school administrative building at Maryland Avenue, another at the Columbiana County Port Authority building on St. George Street, and the third monitoring station was placed at the East Liverpool water plant on Michigan Avenue.

According to Settles, the average concentrations of manganese exceeded U.S. EPA standards at all three locations.

The highest concentration was recorded at the water plant monitoring station where results indicated an average of 34 times U.S. EPA recommended safe levels for manganese inhalation exposure.

The monitoring site along Michigan Avenue showed the highest concentrations of chromium at two times the acceptable health risk values for carcinogens.

“Manganese is going to be the main concern here,” Settles said due to the higher level of concentration.

According to Settles, the Ohio EPA determined S.H. Bell Company is the source contributing to the elevated outdoor air concentrations of both manganese and chromium.

Korleski asked S.H. Bell officials to respond promptly to his letter of findings and orders which would require the company to take immediate steps to control air emissions.

“The company has 14 days to reply to the letter and to make arrangements to sit down and negotiate and enter into a voluntary enforcement action,” Settles said.

Those talks would likely take place at the state offices in Columbus.

If the company does not cooperate with the voluntary action, Settles said the Ohio EPA can “issue unilateral orders” but such action could be appealed by the company.

“Frankly, we’re hopeful they will enter into a conversation,” Settles said. “What we want to see is action from the company on ways to get emissions under control. The real issue is all the dust going into the air.”

S.H. Bell’s “Stateline” facility along Michigan Avenue — which is partially in Pennsylvania — and the “Little England” facility at Saint George and Walter streets handle, process and store ferroalloys. The company owns a third facility in Newell.

Due to the involvement of the Tri-State area, Korleski has asked health officials from the local level, from other states and from federal agencies for assistance in evaluating the potential human health impacts.

"We don't have a sense of how big of an area we need to look at," Settles said. "Additional studies will help us produce a zone for the investigation. That's one of the things we are going to have to determine."

Settles said the other agencies are being pressed into service because Korleski "wants a comprehensive view on what's going on."

Settles said the company is being asked to put some control measures into place as soon as possible which would include enclosing some storage piles and screening operations, tarping trucks, paving roads and using water trucks, sweepers and other devices to minimize the dust produced during operations.

Settles said because the investigation is in its infancy, it is difficult to determine the scope of any potential health related problems and how far from the facility the problem could extend.

"This is something that's got to be corrected," Settles said. "The visible emissions can be better controlled."

The state action for redress is on an "entirely different track" than the federal EPA findings issued against the company, but Settles added the two actions do share some similarities.

East Liverpool Mayor Jim Swoger said he was notified of the situation Tuesday afternoon as was East Liverpool Health Commissioner Gary Ryan.

Both Swoger and Ryan said they were reviewing the Ohio EPA findings.

"I've been in contact with the state EPA and we are waiting to respond to the issues," Swoger said Tuesday. "They made sure everyone was aware of this."

Section: News Date Posted: 2/6/2008

Gongwer, February 5, 2008

OEPA ORDERS REDUCTIONS IN TOXIC AIR EMISSIONS IN EAST LIVERPOOL

High levels of toxic metals in East Liverpool air prompted state officials Tuesday to order a local processor to cut emissions. Regulators are also seeking help from the federal government in assessing the risk to public health.

In response to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's recent air quality study of the area, Director Chris Korleski ordered the S.H. Bell Company to immediately begin reducing manganese and chromium emissions at its Stateline and Little England facilities. Measures include enclosing some storage piles and screening operations, covering trucks, paving roads, and using water trucks, sweepers and other means to minimize dust.

Outdoor air samples collected between 2000 and 2007 showed concentrations of manganese at one location averaged 34 times U.S. EPA's recommended safe levels for inhalation exposure, the agency said. Chromium levels were twice the acceptable health risk values for carcinogens.

"There are other sources of Mn and Cr emissions in the East Liverpool area, but they are very minor in comparison to the emissions from the S.H. Bell Company and could not cause the high concentrations we are observing at the three monitoring sites," Mr. Korleski wrote in a letter to the company. "There must be additional reductions in the emissions of Mn and Cr at the S.H. Bell Company's facilities and I hope the company is willing to work with us expeditiously to achieve that goal."

Long-term exposure to manganese can damage to the kidneys, liver and brain and may cause mental and emotional disturbances and slow and clumsy body movements, according to the OEPA. Inhaling high levels of chromium increases the risk of cancer and can cause skin irritations, nosebleeds, and ulcers. Both elements occur naturally in rocks that can enter the air from steel and power plants, coke ovens, mining and other industrial operations.

"I am very concerned about these findings and the potential for impacts to human health and the environment," Director Korleski stated. "I am moving quickly to bring other agencies up to speed on this study."

Director Korleski has shared the sampling results with the U.S. EPA as well as local officials, the Ohio Department of Health, and environmental regulators in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the agency said. He has also asked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a community health study and assist in evaluating potential health impacts.

Company officials were still reviewing the OEPA's action and declined to comment.



OEPA targets manganese in air

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Readings showed the highest level of a potentially dangerous metal in the United States.

BY D.A. WILKINSON

VINDICATOR SALEM BUREAU

EAST LIVERPOOL — The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency has started an enforcement action to lower air emissions that can harm people.

The OEPA has monitored air quality in East Liverpool from 2000 to 2007 at two S.H. Bell Co. facilities.

Tests from three monitors show the highest level of manganese in the United States, according to Mike Settles, an OEPA spokesperson.

High exposure to manganese, a natural metal, can cause mental and emotional disturbances, slow and clumsy body movements, and damage to the liver, kidneys and brain, according to the OEPA.

S.H. Bell breaks up ore and other materials at the two facilities, Settles said.

The OEPA has given the company two weeks to respond.

If there is no response, the OEPA will tell the company what to do, Settles added.

The company could not be reached Tuesday after business hours.

Tests at one of the monitors showed readings average 34 times the U.S. EPA's recommended safe levels for inhalation exposure.

Another monitor showed chromium concentrations at twice the acceptable health risk for carcinogens.

Settles said OEPA Director Chris Korleski said of the test results, "It's a serious concern."

East Liverpool residents have complained about emissions for years from the company's two locations.

The State Line site is at 101 state Route 68, Midland, Pa., along the northern bank of the Ohio River. The site covers about 92 acres, half of which is in Ohio. The site uses 28 covered storage and processing buildings and stores bulk and packaged materials.

The company's Web site says that its Little England site is located off of St. George Street in East Liverpool, also on the northern bank of the Ohio River. The site covers approximately 8.5 acres with three covered storage and processing buildings. The site also provides outside concrete storage pads for storing bulk and packaged materials.

Korleski is also asking for help from state and federal officials in assessing the health effects.

It's the county's second health issue in recent weeks. Last month, two congressmen asked that the final assessment of staff members at the Federal Correctional Institution in Elkton exposed to toxic levels of cadmium and lead be completed quickly.

U.S. Reps. Tim Ryan, of Niles, D-17th, and Charles Wilson, of St. Clairsville, D-6th, have written to the U.S. Justice Department asking the final assessment be completed "without delay."

A recently released report by the justice department's Office of Inspector General said a multiagency investigation determined that employees at the prison in Elkrum Township were exposed to levels of cadmium and lead 450 times than are allowable by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

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